

# Sex, Borders And Identity Transvestism: Latino Men Who Have Sex With Men In The International Context Of The American Southwest

*Dr. Brian L. Adams-Thies, Drake University*

**Abstract:** This article addresses the various ideological constructions of the US-Mexican border from the perspective of Latino Men Who Have Sex with Men. These men constructed the border through the assignation of various qualities supposedly inherent in bodies and landscapes. In engaging in these assignations, this article will argue that in fact these men embody ideologies that create the border as not just a mark in the geopolitical landscape but also as a lived and practiced reality. The border is therefore a bodily experience of regimes of power-knowledge-pleasure (Foucault) which allows borderlanders to manipulate these regimes for various reasons including: avoiding social injury; use of specific zones of the body; and engaging in identity transvestism. Overall, this article engages queer theory; borderland theory; and demonstrates the complexity of the border as a lived and embodied phenomenon.

**Keywords:** borderlands; queer studies; sexuality

## Introduction

Borders shape and contour not only landscapes but also cultures, history, power and bodies. We live and function on either side of gender, ethnic, sexual, national and state borders. Most borders, however, are not static or even geological, but socially delineated and maintained. The dynamic and socially constructed nature of borders causes much consternation to governmental regimes. The recent attempts at militarization of the Mexican-United States border through the construction of high tech walls to serve as battlements for the concretization of the border is evidence of the extent to which government becomes preoccupied in spatializing their hegemony. Despite these attempts at creating a physical wall between the two nations, flows of people continue to go back and forth. The porosity of the Mexican-United States Border exists not only because of the numerous legal and illegal border crossers traversing the line daily, but also in the ideological understanding and construction of the border. The line

is not just a presence on a map but also a line demarcating social possibilities and limitations. As a result, the border exists as both a physical and ideological/symbolic construct that affects landscapes, bodies and the very physicality of the experience of nation and border.

Using ethnographic data, this paper explores a specific population of border crossers: Latino Men-Who-Have-Sex-With Men (LMSM). I address the manner in which these men create and understand the Mexican-United States Border. These men discuss the line as not only a marker of sovereignty between nations but also as a line between possibility and limitation of embodied experience. For this group of men the border became an integral part of their sexual experience and seeking to maximize pleasure. Through their utilization of the border in the search for pleasure this group also found themselves embodying border ideologies. In my estimation, border ideologies are mappings of meanings that can at times coincide with nation-state; popular culture; and folk notions of border but are not limited by those categorizations. The mix of these various categorical ideologies and their locations within space produce what Foucault calls "regimes of power-knowledge-pleasure" (Foucault 1978) which in turn discipline and even produce bodies.

The reasons these men gave for cross-border movement and even their understanding of the possibilities and limitations of the border varied according to their age, their ethnic identification, their political affiliations and their country of origin. This study explores how Latino MSM constructed the border through their ideological creation of qualities supposedly inherent in landscapes and people on either side of the border. From this application of inherent qualities these men were better able to engage in their manipulations of the border for the following reasons: allowance of experientially different body practices; maintenance of societal approval of their gender performance through their self-placement in new economies of desire (Gopinath 2002); and the accrual of symbolic cultural capital within such economies (Bourdieu 1972). First, I will trace some of the literature addressing the relation of political border and the necessary ideological overlay required to make that border substantial. I will then discuss some of the work on border theory and point out how these works fail to take into account the bodily experience of borders. Then I will move into the ethnographic data as a means to demonstrate the embodiment of border ideologies. Finally, I will end the paper with a discussion of the effects of embodying ideologies on the very fixity of the landscape.

### **Historical Border Formations: Politics and/or Pleasure**

The border between the U.S. and Mexico is an arbitrary and almost wholly non-geographic demarcation. The Rio Bravo or Rio Grande, which has been transformed into neither a wild nor big river, stretches from El Paso to the Gulf Coast and serves as a geographic marker of US and Mexican sovereignty. Yet, the border west of El Paso offers no real geographic feature that helps to create a physical line in the desert between the two nations. As a result, this particular border has long required that people believe in its importance, necessity and relevance as a marker of distinction between cultures, languages and peoples. This demand by nation(s) for their populations to acquiesce to an ideology separating Mexican from American is essentially an attempt to create an ideological overlay to the political border. There has to be ideological work (and a lot of it) to maintain imaginary and clear cultural and political distinctions between borderlands populaces in the southwestern United States. This ideological work means creating not only different cultures but also different social milieus; different hegemonic constructions of gendered and sexualized possibilities; and differing identity formations.

Miguel León-Portilla cites the 1819 Treaty of Onís, ratified in 1832 by the United States and Mexico, as the historical moment a political and cultural boundary was established and recognized between Mexico and the United States of America. This treaty fixed the northern boundaries of Mexico: "by virtue of that treaty, the North acquired a new type of physical and cultural frontier, internationally recognized and no longer open to subsequent forms of expansion" (León-Portilla 1972: 80). Yet, the boundary itself would be radically altered through the annexation by the U.S. of the Republic of Texas in 1845 and the Gadsden Purchase in 1854. Thus, by 1854 the physical border, the line between two sovereign nations, had been established and ratified.

Though this border had been agreed upon by two nations, the actual lived cultural experience on either side of the border was left markedly intact. Spaniards and later Mexicans had long maintained control of most of the area annexed by the United States. Mexican culture continued to be lived throughout the borderlands despite their recent membership in the new United States (Anzaldúa 1987; Martinez 1988; Martinez 1994). As the immigrant rights movement states "We didn't cross the border, the border crossed us". Peoples on either side of this border suddenly found themselves on either side of a line, neither geographic nor physical in any real sense. As a result, both nations, in order to maintain hege-

monic control of their decided spaces, had to undertake massive ideological border constructions dictating what qualities constituted Mexico and the United States. These ideologies have and continue to include many aspects mapped onto bodies and cultures, including: race and ethnicity; health; cleanliness and hygiene; work ethic; morality; and certainly language. The ideological production of the border sought to produce difference and locate that difference in bodies, possibilities and limitations.

The onset of Prohibition (1919) created one of the first spectacular manipulations of the ideological differences between the two nations. The passage of the Volstead Act (1919) made the USA supposedly 'dry' while Mexico was 'wet'. Thus, the border served as a line of possibility and limitation of the pleasure(s) of imbibing in drink and other vices. "Vice" was located south of the border, while north was considered dry and moral (dry and moral seem to go together quite frequently but that is a topic for another paper). A comparable process of ideological production of borders within the city and the fixing of the location of vice can be found in Chicago around the same time:

After the passage of the Volstead Act and enforcement of Prohibition, these interzones became more deeply marginalized – their borders more pronounced – but also, in a sense, subculturally invigorated (Mumford 1997:20).

"Vice" and its association to a specific geography within a city produced interzones and created more "pronounced" borders between moralities and space simultaneously. A very similar process of border pronouncement through ideologies of morality occurred at the site of the Mexican-US border with one side offering the possibility of "vice" and the other side attempting to control that same "vice".

The drying up of southern states demanded that "vice" investors cross the border to develop their businesses and provide a commodity to those less-than-moral-Americans (Machado 1982). This new border was mapped not only through the production and consumption of alcohol, but also through gambling and sexuality. Curtis Hedges, a writer for the New York Times claims that directly after Prohibition "...Tijuana was such a single commodity town that of 1,091 residents 200 were prostitutes" (Hedges 1991). Much the same way metropolitan interzones developed as a result of a moral overlay on urban spaces, the socio-political border between the United States and Mexico began to demonstrate a line of supposed moral

ity measured through the pleasurable practices of alcohol consumption and sex.

Even after Prohibition was overturned, the border between the United States and Mexico continued to demarcate political and moral boundaries while also providing variant opportunities for social interaction. According to Kirk Bowman, the huge influx of American military bases in the borderlands during World War II created new economies in which the ideological production of the border centered around a commodified sexuality:

World War II provided the new clientele and the border vice was able to transform itself to service the customers. Military bases dotted the borderlands and hundreds of thousands of soldiers and sailors were willing participants in the creation of "Boystowns" where the ladies of the evening of the 1920s were replaced with prostitutes and the glamorous marble of casinos was replaced with the fake velvet of seedy cabarets (Bowman 1994: 57).

Bowman traces ever-changing vice and its border overlay into the present day, claiming that the decrease in Americans crossing the border for sex demanded the Mexican side diversify their "menus." This diversification included providing rarer sexual pleasures such as transvestite or transsexual offerings (Ibid.). James Curtis and Daniel Arreola claim modern day tolerance zones (*zonas de tolerancia*) (areas of strip clubs, brothels and casinos) provide "...little to contemporary connoisseurs of hedonism, just lower prices and an exotic setting. These two comparative advantages are sufficient to have a steady stream of college boys and U.S. servicemen to patronize....and preserve the border component of sex" (Curtis 1991: 108). Thus, the border continues to be produced not only around socio-political and physical demarcations but also through ideologies of morality mapped onto bodies and their pleasures.

Through this brief historical survey of the border it is obvious that demarcated spaces have very real effects upon the bodies that traverse these spaces. Richard Peet views space, or landscape, as part of social regulation even outside of the national and political sovereignty invested in international borders. He claims that landscapes generally are the "projectors of regulatory power" (Peet 1996: 22). Within these landscapes certain representations and expressions are made possible or limited. Conversely possibilities and limitations also become the indicators and producers of space in a dialectical process of signification. Space can be constructed to

create embodied experiences of those possibilities and limitations within a cityscape/landscape/border. This embodiment furthers the project of the production of geographic space by moving a line on a map to an experience of that line within the body itself. Altogether, the border has become a 'projector of regulatory power' controlling not only expressions and representations but also embodied experience that helps to construct the line; and yet, traveling between and across that line realigns, reasserts and resists the proscribed possibility and limitation.

### **Borderlands Study: Where are the Bodies in the Border?**

Borderlands undermine the "concept of a fixed, unitary and bounded culture" and help in locating "the reality of society in historically changing, imperfectly bounded, multiple and branching alignments" that give a sense of "the fluidity and permeability of cultural sets" (Wolf 1982: 22). According to Rosaldo (1993), despite "permeability" social borders in the urban milieu do arise around salient social categories such as: sexual orientation, gender, age, profession, etc. (Rosaldo 1993: 207-208).

Both Wolf and Rosaldo fail to acknowledge the social/embodied construction (and necessity for some groups of people) borders that overlap, intersect, coincide with national-political demarcations. The authors are more concerned with looking at social borders as containers of cultural units. In order to better understand how borders function we must explore the manner and method of intersections, overlaps and coincidences between national-political borders and social borders of identity. By understanding these overlaps we better understand how political/social hegemony is both lived, produced and challenged through practices and embodiments.

Populations both creating and manipulating the overlaps between national-political and social borders can and have been described as 'borderlanders.' These borderlanders are those who immerse themselves in the various processes offered by a border zone:

On the U.S.-Mexico border, as in any borderland, the human spectrum ranges from the quintessential border people (individuals highly immersed in transnational and transcultural interaction) to people who, for one reason or another, are influenced very little by the presence of the boundary and are therefore not much different from people living in interior areas (Martinez 1994: xvii).

Martinez fails to explore the active and strategic positioning of borderlanders in their manipulations of the manners and methods of intersections and overlaps between social borders and national borders. In addition, throughout his work Martinez doesn't address the bodily experiences and productions of the border. By not engaging in explorations of the method of producing border through body, Martinez misses one of the integral aspects of discipline, control and resistance manifested at the site of the border.

Southwest borderlands scholars have understood the border as mostly a political and economic demarcation allowing more opportunity on the North American side of the border. Martínez, in his earlier work, claims the border is constructed through socio-economic inequality between the two nations. The border exists as an 'escape valve for poverty and lack of economic opportunity in Mexico' (Martinez 1988: 98). Other analysts expand the reasons for Mexican national's border crossings to include: better education for children; and manipulation of the unemployment remuneration system in the U.S. (North 1970). Rarely is the Mexican side of the border understood to offer opportunities of any sort. As will be seen in this study, the Mexican side of this border does offer opportunity if we include within our analysis the variant regimes of regulatory power and the bodily discipline present on either side of the line (Foucault 1995).

Bodily disciplinary regimes are distinct on either side of the line. The exploration of these regimes helps to better understand how pleasure-knowledge-power regimes produce bodies by connecting sex and power. The Northern Mexican regime offered juridical discourse and social practice evidencing themes of permissiveness and restrictiveness, respectfully, throughout Mexico. The national government maintained no laws explicitly outlawing same-sex sexual relations. Article 201 of the Mexican Penal Code prohibits sex with minors of either sex, and proffers an increased penalty if the child is of the same sex as that of the adult. This article exists as the only stipulation against same-sex behavior at the national level. Nogales, Sonora (where most of the men I spoke with in person crossed the border) does not have any stipulations regarding sodomy or same-sex sexual behavior in private space. Due to the lack of laws regulating same-sex sexual acts, Mexican juridical discourse constructs a permissive attitude toward those acts.

Ethnographic investigations of Mexican social/sexual practice promptly debunk the notion that permissive juridical discourse enables permissive sexual attitudes (Carrier 1985; Murray 1995; Prieur 1998). Tomás Almaguer, studying identity formations of Chicano gay men, states that

the Northern Mexican sexual system is fraught with gender prescribed roles directly affecting sexual behavior (Almaguer 1993; Alonso 1993). In the Mexican sexual configuration the male is always aggressive and active (the penetrator) while the female is always passive and receptive (the penetrated). As a result, a Mexican man may engage in homosexual sex as long as he is the penetrator. Accordingly he will experience no social stigma or even self-censure. The penetrated, on the other hand, is the personage who is truly suspect as he is violating the very rules of gender upon which the North Mexican sexual system relies (Almaguer 1993: 260). In other words, North Mexican culture controls and produced the gendered body by allowing only certain sexual actions, positions and loci of pleasure.

According to Almaguer, the family is also a site of sexual control. The importance of *la familia* arises and is buttressed by various economic and traditional dictates. Many individuals in Mexico cannot afford to live away from the economic security of the familial collective. As a result, tradition requires young people to live with parents until marriage (Almaguer 1993; Murray 1995). Both Murray and Almaguer argue that sexuality is not discussed in these families and most young people are left without much education on the topic (Ibid). Cohabitation with family members and the tradition of not speaking about sexuality creates a far more "important and restrictive role in structuring homosexual behavior among Mexican men" (Almaguer 1993: 260). Thus, sex lives of Mexican and even Mexican-American men who have sex with men are constrained by family rules, by the lack of private space for sexual encounters and the inability to discuss sexual concerns with family members.

A perusal of secondary literature and prevention programs originating in Mexico demonstrate Mexicans' perception of a United States fraught with sexual availability. Within the first years of the epidemic, Mexican AIDS prevention messaging framed AIDS as a disease contracted from the other side. Latino groups on both sides of the border perceived AIDS as an importation from white gay men in the United States (Alonso 1993). These AIDS prevention messages constructed Mexico as insulated, traditional and family oriented, all qualities understood to provide protection from the disease. My work with Southern Arizona AIDS Foundation (SAAF) in the years 1997-98 demonstrated that Latinos recently immigrated to Tucson from Mexico, or Mexican nationals who maintain visas for living and working in the United States, perceive less risk of HIV infection while in Mexico. Halley Freitas' (contract anthropologist for SAAF during the early 1990's) work (1993) with Latino MSM also demonstrated

the same perception of a Mexico untouched or somehow innocent: "The group thought to be overall least at risk among gay men are Mexican MSM (men who have sex with men) because their perceived lack of contact with men who are HIV positive" (Freitas 1993: 12). In both Freitas' work and throughout the course of this project, participants directly attributed increased HIV risk in the United States to the sexually permissive nature of the society, while morality and family represent the Mexican/Chicano social/sexual system. This appears an interesting reversal to the popular American conception of a moral United States with an immoral or vice-ridden neighbor to the south.

Understanding the U.S. as more permissive and therefore sex in the U.S. as more risky for HIV infection does not necessarily limit Mexican nationals' sexual interactions. In a study of migrant workers originating from Michoacán and working in Santa Cruz County, California, researchers found increased promiscuous sexual behavior on the U.S. side (Bronfman 1992). Additionally, the study found an increase in the number of men participating in homosexual/bisexual type behaviors within the U.S. Participants in the study attributed their increase in sexual activity and subsequent increased condom use on the U.S. side to a perceived American sexual liberty (Bronfman 1992: 18). Altogether, Mexican and Mexican-American visage of the U.S. constructs an accommodating environment for the pursuit and fulfillment of numerous sexual desires, especially those socially prohibited within the confines of Mexico, but this environment also results in more risk.

Sexuality and the border have been connected by various discussions of *zonas de tolerancia* (tolerance zones), prostitution and Prohibition (some of which I have introduced above). However, these academic discussions have been fraught with myopic visions and silence regarding homosexuality and the border. In addition, most of these discussions have failed to engage bodily experiences and constructions of the border. Anzaldúa and Moraga are the exceptions providing productive and theoretically seminal works discussing the role of female (homo)sexuality and its relation to the border, as well as embodied experiences of that border (Anzaldúa 1987; Moraga 1983). Discussions of male homosexuality and its relation to the U.S.-Mexican Border appear as a substantial lacuna within historical and anthropological literature. Some recent works have attempted to uncover the historical placement and functioning of 'deviant sexualities' in the borderlands of both the past and present. Alan Weisman (1986) provides one of the first acknowledgments of non-heterosexual prostitution through his descriptions of transvestite prostitutes and their Anglo-

American customers within Nuevo Laredo's *zona de tolerancia*. Jay Dusard's photos accompany Weisman's descriptions of the 'queer' bodies of these border transvestites, surgical breast implants and all (Weisman 1986: 39-40, plate 15). Oscar Martínez (1994) mentions that homosexuals might cross the border for the experience of a more permissive north and then proceeds directly to a small interview with a transvestite prostitute meant to 'provide glimpses into the environment in which homosexuals function' (Ibid.). Aside from the obvious problem of collapsing the categories of transvestite, prostitute and homosexual, Martínez does not engage in any other research to substantiate his claim of a permissive north and traditional south, leaving the question of non-heterosexual sexualities for others to explore.

The border should never be viewed from just one perspective. In fact, most of the above mentioned literature makes sweeping generalizations about life on either side of the border in an attempt to maintain the notion of culture as cohesive and contained. A more productive method of analysis might be the construction of the border through embodied practices and discourse (Abu-Lughod 1991). Addressing the practices and discourses deployed by borderlanders aids in understanding the border as dynamic and as a process of embodied practices and understandings. This dynamic perspective will undermine the easy conceptions and stereotypes which come about as a result of viewing the border from just one side; and as a concretized geo-political marker that is freed of its own discursive production by those living and traversing the line. The men in this project demonstrate how swift and general conceptions of north as sexually liberal and south as sexually conservative are not adequate portrayals of the intricacies of the border's ideological construction. Rather, the border is constructed by numerous groups for numerous purposes. Sometimes those constructions coincide with the actual geopolitical line and the metanarratives of nationalism that create a separation between the U.S. and Mexico; and sometimes there is no coincidence. These men simultaneously undermine and reify metanarratives of nationalism, sexuality, gender and power in their practices and discourses that both create and manipulate the border.

### **Methodology**

This study is based on field discussions and participant observation with Latino MSM in Nogales, Arizona and Sonora as well as Tucson, Arizona in the academic year of 1998. The original intent was to utilize a burgeon-

ing cross-border AIDS prevention program through SAAF in Nogales, Arizona and Nogales, Sonora as the tool by which to find participants. However, due to initial discussions and the manner in which participants tailored their answers to an AIDS awareness agenda, I chose to recruit outside of the program as well. The population has been split by age group, eighteen years of age to thirty-five; and then thirty-five and older, as well as by national citizenship. All of the participants lived at least part time in the U.S.

The primary method of data collection was an in-depth, anonymous conversations, lasting on the average of an hour. Four conversations were conducted for each section of the population in question (Latino MSM 18-35 Mexican-Americans, Latino MSM 18-35 Mexicans, Latino MSM 35 and older Mexican-Americans, Latino MSM 35 and older Mexicans) totaling sixteen face to face interviews specifically conducted for this study. Men were recruited from popular bars, cruising locations and through friends of initial informants. My being a gay man and my presence in these locations helped to put participants at ease and aided in the natural flow of conversation.

In addition to face to face conversations, I conducted twelve online conversations, three from each population. The men participating in online interactions lived within the Borderlands area, from Texas to California, and stated that they had crossed the border within the past two months and at least five times a year. I encountered these men in chatrooms offered through America Online, a popular online service. I found participants in chatrooms with such names as Latino M4M, Tucson M4M, and San Diego M4M. I found online conversations to be somewhat helpful in Latino MSM sharing intimate sexual details; details that most face to face interviewees asked if they should share before actually speaking. I am very aware that online interviews are not without problems, especially since the ability to verify ethnic identity and language through physical interaction is not an option. As a corrective, throughout the interview I tried to identify similarities and differences to those men interviewed in person in an attempt to substantiate both the information shared and the identity of the person with whom I was communicating.

### **Mexican Gender Systems: Marriage, Hypermasculinity and Desire**

All informants described gender roles in Mexico as much more static and concrete than in the U.S. Common phrases included “either you are really, really a man or really, really a woman,”(LMSM 1) “when they are

effeminate they are really, really effeminate,"(LMSM 4) and "they should either have heels and a wig on or cowboy boots and an open shirt with a hairy chest" (Online LMSM 6). One face to face discussion participant put the dichotomous gender role situation into a context of socialization:

...there are only two roles. I mean they (Mexicans) are only taught a male and a female role there is no other role. There is no role model (for what he calls 'gay' men). How can you portray anything if you do not have someone to show you how to act? I mean none of us are individuals, we are a compilation of everything that we are exposed to and what we accept and copy. I mean they do not have any other demonstration. I mean if you want to be..... if you want to sleep with men then you are a señorita...you know you go around in those clothes (LMSM 2).

This informant demonstrates quite clearly the strict male/female gender split based upon sexual object choice in Mexico. Yet, he also claims that "gayness" exists as a foreign sexual system both outside of the Mexican gender constructions and outside of the geographic space of Mexico. The implication becomes that 'gay' as an identity necessitates a social model not evident in Mexico at the time and which directly challenges a Mexican binary gendered system.

The challenge posed by the category "gay" to this binary gendered system also undermines the concerted manipulations of this gendered system by men who have sex with men. The men in this study used this binary gendered system to create and sustain identities and possibilities of pleasure. For some men this binary gendered system served as a means of constructing the hyper-masculine sexual appeal of Mexican men. For other men this system and the performance of gender (Butler 1993) necessitated by said system helped to alleviate suspicion of their participation in sex with men. Essentially, enactment of masculinity by and through a binary system demanding the stolid rejection of the feminine through body and discursive practices sustain the stereotype of the "Mexican macho". The stereotype, in turn, helps some men to experience the erotic "other" and helps others to create identities free of suspicion of same-sex desire.

Many of the informants interviewed discussed variant gender practices on either side of the border. These practices manipulated 'appropriate' gender roles/performances and indicated how these men understood the possibilities and limitations present on either side of the line. One informant, a forty-four year old AIDS prevention worker and Mexican na-

tional, discussed how North Mexican social mores functioned to reward and punish those performing or failing to perform masculine attributes. In what follows, he describes how members of his original smaller Northern Mexican community became 'nosy' about those not correctly performing masculinity:

Yeah nosy, like why are you guys living together? Why aren't you guys don't have girlfriends? Or why does it that you do not have families? So it is a lot of pressure, that is why a lot of gay people have to cross the border back and forth or permanently migrate, because if you are not married it is hard for you to have a status in Mexico. You can't get into the government or into a bank or other kind of bureaucracy you know what I mean?

Brian: You mean without a wife?

Yeah, even though it is not something that is written, they say this guy is not married something is wrong and they give you excuses (LMSM 13).

This particular informant lives in the U.S. with his Mexican boyfriend. He is also married to a woman in Mexico and has two children whom he visits monthly. He is hardly ever present in the heterosexual family space and his wife is unaware of his sexual behaviors on the American side of the border. This individual thereby demonstrates an appropriate gender performance and embodiment within the Mexican context (a husband/father/provider) and yet, traverses the border in order to embody a new set of gender/sexual practices and possibilities.

A fifty-year old informant, working as a rancher in Northern Sonora, had the following to say about his personal ability to claim macho status on one side of the border and yet engage in same-sex sex on the other side:

Oh yeah especially with the Mexicans I show that I am real macho when I am at the ranch. I show to the rest of the people that I am macho because I go out with other girls, not just my wife, but like I say on the other side I have a lover and I let him take a macho role (LMSM 15).

Of the four men in the Mexican thirty-five and older group, three were legally married and two of them continued to live with their wives, while participating in same-sex sex. The under thirty-five Mexican group had only one married male. All of the Mexican-American men were unmar-

ried. This data points to a possible generational change in the systems of gendered performance and the rise of a form of internationalization of “gay” identity.<sup>1</sup> In addition, the fact that none of the Mexican-American men were married demonstrates the variant sexual/gender systems and their embodiment on either side of the border. The Mexican-American men are more able to organize their identities around their participation in same-sex sex and without as much social detriment as their Mexican neighbors.

The dichotomous gender scripts and resultant ‘hypermasculinity’ produced in Mexico have been fetishized by the Mexican-American men. There was a majority consensus that Mexican men were more manly, more able perform sexually and generally had more sex appeal than men on the northern side of the border. A group of Mexican-American men encountered in a Tucson cruising location, one above thirty-five and the others younger, talked about what they perceived as a machismo endemic only to Mexican men in Mexico:

- (1) They know how to act, they just fuck like a rabbit.....
  - (2) See because only the Mexican men in Mexico are more macho, usually when they come here they are shyer. I think they feel they need to be different here.
  - (3) Well see that is how they are raised in their culture there. A lot of machismo and so you generally, um, get real men. They are aggressive and dominant....
- (2) I really like it with them when I go there. They are like a conqueror and they are fully dominant. It is so nice for it to be animalistic and picante (1=LMSM 9; 2=LMSM 3; 3=LMSM 2).

The romanticization of the dominant Mexican male macho occurred in most of the discussions with Mexican-Americans both in person and online (9 out of 14). Many crossed the border specifically for encounters with an embodiment of machismo. However, all of the referenced sexual encounters took place within hotel rooms the Mexican-American purchased, in the Mexican-Americans’ cars or within a semi-public space; never within the home or private space of the Mexican macho. Altogether,

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1 “Internacional” is also a term used to describe a man who engages in both anal penetration and penetrating. Interesting relationship between the notion of internationalizing gay identity and how that identity is understood to affect bodies and pleasures.

the Mexican-American participants fetishized the machismo of the Mexican male, thereby making border crossing a necessary component in experiencing what one interviewee termed getting '..... fucked by a real man with hard hands and of course a, can I say it? A true Mexican man-cock' (Online LMSM 8).

Therefore, the border serves as a marker of gender systems that simultaneously produce/enable and limit/maximize the production of bodies, identities and pleasures. The Mexican binary system of gender is both defined the pleasure and the bodily sites of that pleasure that could result in same-sex sex for the Mexican MSM. The same gender system protected those men that could successfully perform masculinity as defined within the system itself. The same Mexican gender system produced the hypermasculinity that was sought after by the Mexican-American men for maximizing their sexual pleasure. As a result, the ideologies of gender existant in Northern Mexico are written upon the very bodies that sought to traverse the line. Bodies and pleasures were produced and manipulated through this very specific regime of power-knowledge-pleasure (Foucault 1978) but certainly not in a top-down or nation-state dictating appropriateness. We see here these regimes being utilized and subverted by the very bodily practices they produce.

### **Anal Border Patrols: Pleasure More Closely Examined**

As evidenced above, masculinity in any gender system dictates body practices and locations on the body from which to derive pleasure as appropriate or inappropriate. Guillermo Nuñez-Noriega argues that not only the practice of, but also the discipline of, the body are founts of symbolic capital:

The body in this way is one of the principle founts of symbolic capital. The images, the fantasies, the dreams are 'good,' 'bad,' 'disgusting,' 'dirty,' 'noble,' etc. Conduct is 'normal,' 'healthy,' 'perverse,' 'sick,' 'natural,' or 'unnatural.' Feelings, desires, and conduct (more or less 'desirable,' or more or less 'normal') are other founts of symbolic capital acting in the sexual realm, but that also have repercussions in other realms where sexual existence is important (Nuñez-Noriega 1994: 44 (translation mine)).

Thus, Noriega offers that certain desires, if deemed appropriate according to the society, are a source of symbolic capital (Bourdieu 1972). Depending upon categorization by a specific "regime of power-knowledge-

pleasure" (Foucault 1978), desire and its bodily location becomes the source of not only capital but also conceivably of symbolic debt.

Within phallogentric society, the male anus and production of pleasure within and on that site of the body become a site of stigma. Thus, policing the anus and establishing the status of an anus as penetrated or virgin become markers of types of masculinity. Therefore, the anus is one of possibly two sites (afterall, the size of the penis has been and continues to be a constant preoccupation (Friedman 2001; Pope 2000; Poulson-Bryant 2005)) that defines the measure of a man. Joseph Carrier argues that throughout Latin America symbolic capital is achieved through the bedding of both men and women, as long as the penetrator remains penis active/anus inactive in both hetero and homosexual encounters (Carrier 1985: 83). Carrier (1985), Almaguer (1993) and Lancaster (1992) all hint, through similar discussions of the importance of being fucked, that the body site of stigma/symbolic debt in this specific regime of power-knowledge-pleasure is indeed the anus. To be penetrated within the Northern Mexican system results in the amassment of a symbolic debt and a social definition of the receiver of anal pleasure as a *cochón*, *maricón*, *puto*, *joto* (all more or less meaning fag) and distinct (re: lesser) from those men around him.

Mexican interviewees within this study demonstrated a distinct fear of accruing a symbolic debt through anal penetration. This fear is so great as to demand a border crossing, which is also a crossing into a new regime of power-knowledge-pleasure, in order to engage in being penetrated. The following is a description, by a twenty-four year old Mexican national, of how men travel in order to be penetrated:

Oh yeah, you need to go outside of your town or even you need to go to the U.S. to find a man. But you know you need to be middle class person to do these things, because you need to travel. If someone sees you inside your town, or you are in Mexico and with someone like that, I mean like getting fucked, and especially if you are in a middle sized city you have to go somewhere else to look for that person who can be your *hombre* if you are an *hombre* too you know? But here in Tucson it is just like you go to the bar and there is someone and you just go to bed with them.

Brian: So did you ever come to Tucson to look for an *hombre*?

Well when I was living in Mexico I came here to Tucson almost every month. Because it was easier for me being gay and being able to be

fucked. Here I could be the bottom and go to their place and not have to worry about if my family found out.....In Mexico is...it.. was much more dangerous for me to be the bottom especially since I was working for a job in the government my father got me (LMSM 6).

All of the Mexican men claiming to enjoy anal sex, regardless of age, stated that they had traveled outside of their towns in Mexico and outside of Mexico in order to be the pasivo (anally penetrated). Yet another participant stated. "I needed to leave where I was at....um....well....I mean you know if someone found out I was on the bottom that would make me die inside. Only jotos and those men dressed like women take it that way. That is how I would be treated if anyone knew" (LMSM 5).

This border crossing behavior is essentially a movement of the body from one regime of power-knowledge-pleasure into another. The anus and anal desire are configured differently on either side of the border as a result of variant disciplinary regimes. These regimes maintain their hegemony by granting symbolic capital and debt according to their own internal logic. In turn, these disciplinary regimes and the very bodies and pleasures that they produce are used to create difference between the US and Mexico. Thus, the experience of the international border is not merely political but embodied. As a result, both border and body require policing and production through regimes of power-knowledge-pleasure in order to maintain political and embodied experiences of hegemony.

### **Social/Sexual Positions and the Politics of Chicano Identity**

Border crossing for the purposes of anal pleasure is not unique to the Mexican nationals. The younger group of Mexican-American men participating within this study also crossed the border to gain anal pleasure not only with 'hombre hombres' but also in order to alleviate symbolic debt accrued through inferior socio-economic positioning coupled with anal receptive sex. These men referenced a political and social register in order to explain their border crossing behavior, whereas the Mexican nationals referenced appropriate masculinity. One online participant (whose online screen name was highly political and included the word "Chicano"), a 22 year old college student in San Diego, demonstrates his usage of a socio-political register to explain why he crosses the border to be pasivo:

.... my friends and even my gay friends in MeChA (Movimiento Estudiantil

Chicano de Aztlán) look down on me for being a bottom. I don't talk to them about it anymore and even more I don't ever get fucked in San Diego anymore. I go to Tijuana and meet guys there. That way I am not going to be found out.

Brian: Why does the fact that you are a bottom matter to your friends, especially your gay friends?

They say if I let myself get fucked it is like the pinche gringos are taking me over.

Brian: Even if the top guy is Latino as well?

Yes, it doesn't matter who is on top it matters that I am getting it (Online LMSM 3).

Of the interviewees in the younger group of Mexican-American men, both personal and online interactions combined (n=7), five referenced politics as a reason to cross the border for anal receptive sex.

Explanation for this behavior arises if one considers the Borderland Latino male's experience of inferior or marginalized status within mainstream Anglo-U.S. culture. José Limón, in his study of working class Mexican-American men in Texas, argues that the underclass is most preoccupied by "anality, pollution and bodily penetration" and they "constitute a body politic symbolically conscious of its socially penetrable status" (Limon 1989: 476). Limón provides an excellent framework for understanding the Mexican-American male's preoccupation with the anus as a sight of penetration and that penetration as an indicator of socio-economic-political inferiority. The anal orifice within Mexican-American society symbolizes not only the possibility of actual penile injection, but is also a figurative site of being chingado (screwed) by those in hegemonic systems of power. As a result, the regime of power-knowledge-pleasure that places Latinos in the USA in an inferior position becomes embodied through the policing of the body and its orifices in a similar process of attribution of symbolic capital/debt mentioned above. The borderlander Chicano MSM is able to escape this regime by entering Mexico where political positions aren't perceived to have any effect on sexual positions.

Political affiliations, along with ethnic identification, inform not only participation in anal sex but also in trans-border movement for the purposes of cruising and potential sex partners. All of the Mexican-Ameri-

cans, despite age differences, claimed a sense of ethnic identification with Mexicans. They perceived Mexico as a homeland, a place where the people, the space they occupy and the actions they undertake are purely Mexican. One interviewee stated that he goes to Mexico because "I can go to a bar and see all different kinds of men, but they are all Latinos like me you know? They are not the broken and domesticated Latinos but true Mexicans you know and I like being in there with them" (LMSM 10). The identification with the Mexicans and the pure Mexican nature of the space was a draw for a majority of the Mexican-American participants (9 out of 14)

Seeking a pure Mexican-ness once again points us to the embodiment of regimes in which space becomes associated or serves as the producer of essence. Nevzat Soguk argues that sovereignty claims, or territorialization, are not just about the construction of national physical borders but "also.... construction of 'representable' cultural, political and economic identities and 'essences' ostensibly overlapping with the physical borders" (Soguk 1996: 286). In Soguk's analysis it is the nation-state attempting to claim sovereignty over the bodies/spaces/actions. However, the Mexican-American men constructed the other side as a homeland with an essence of Mexican-ness. Through that specific construction of the other side of the border, these men are embodying the very process of territorialization. Territorialization obviously has its own set of pleasures to be experienced within its very embodiment (the experience of pure Mexican-ness).

Overall, Mexican-American men experienced bodily the regimes of power-knowledge-pleasure that sought to define them as politically/economically/ethnically subaltern. In attempts to undermine these regimes they traversed the border to engage in a differently perceived regime organizing pleasure and bodies around concrete binary gender systems. This perceived Mexican regime allowed the experience of anal pleasure denied to these men in the US. This traversal also created bodily experiences of territorialization by attributing essences to bodies and spaces on the other (Mexican) side of the border.

### **Latino Calor and More Cultural Capital**

All of the participants, in both age groups and both genres, attributed themselves and other Latinos with a certain quality referenced as "calor." Interestingly enough the archetype for this quality, at that time, was Antonio Banderas. Of the total number of interviews, both in person and online (n=28) twenty of the men said that Latinos are better lovers

and referenced Banderas (a Spaniard and not a Latin American) as in (I am or they (Latino MSM) are) “more passionate like...um... like Antonio Banderas” (LMSM 13). When asked about how sex with Latino men is different from Anglo men most responded as these three interviewees:

(1) I get into it

(2) Yeah for like hours

(1) It is more picante, we are uninhibited, more foreplay, licking all over..

(3) Yeah in the middle during and after...

(1) Yeah it can last hours and it is not just orgasm but all that stuff ending up to it...

(2) Anglos are more about the cumming right way and then done with it

(1) Yeah it is wham bam thank you ma'am with them, which is weird...

(1=LMSM 9; 2= LMSM 3; 3=LMSM 2)

When asked if they ever crossed the border to find Latino men for this picante and calor-like sexual experience most of the men in both groups replied in the affirmative but stated the person merely had to be Latino and spatial positioning was not always indicative of this calor-like quality (20 out of 28). It is interesting to note that though these interviewees, both Mexican and Mexican-American, sought *hombre* in Mexico, they also seek a non-goal (orgasm) oriented sex with other Latinos regardless of the border. However, most ascribed increased chances of such a sexual encounter to the Mexican context because after all “there are just more Latinos there, Latinos in all shapes, colors, sizes. I can have a preppy one or a gangbang one. There is just more to choose from on the other side” (LMSM 6).

As a result of this Latino calor and the conscious manufacture of a supposedly specific Latino erotic affect, these men are able to market and understand themselves as a rare and valuable sexual commodity because they are “...better at making someone really enjoy sex, not just a race to get to the finish line..... can I say it? Cum” (LMSM 5). These men imagine and present themselves as specific types of sexual beings precisely because in the American context this sexualization has offered forms of symbolic capital based on Latino-ness.

The question arises then: How and why has this sexual quality been attributed to Latinos and why would this group of men voluntarily embody a regime of ethnic/racial identification? Ann Laura Stoler’s work (1995) on the colonial enterprise and its relationship to the definition of sexuality demonstrates the creation of racial symbolics based upon phe-

notypic traits: "Discourses of sexuality, racial thinking, and rhetorics of nationalism have several things in common. All hinge on visual markers of distinction that profess to – but only poorly index – the internal traits, psychological dispositions, and moral essence on which these theories of difference and social membership are based" (Stoler 1995: 133). Stoler argues that racialized sexualities emerged as a project through which the European bourgeoisie could define themselves against the "other" within colonial spaces. These embodied differences then furthered the very project of racial distinction by associating colonized sexualities with morality, health and supposed social evolution.

These Latino men appropriated and sought to embody colonial/imperialist processes of sexualization as an ethnic boundary marker. The concepts of *calor* and *picante* both distinguished them from Anglo men while affording them symbolic capital by way of popular understandings of racialized sexualities within the US context. The Latino men within this study have embodied the image of a sexualized Other attributed a sensuous and passionate sexuality or at least unhampered by puritanical morality. Though the *calor* image results from a long history of regimes of power-knowledge-pleasure intent on producing and policing imperialist/colonial interaction, this same regime has been embodied by these men in order to distinguish and capitalize on a symbolic capital (perhaps one of the few sources of symbolic capital) offered them within a hegemonic system generally placing them in the subaltern position.

### **AIDS: An Untouched Mexico**

AIDS was and continues to be an important discourse in the lives of many men engaging in same-sex sexual relations, this population is no exception. The border offers a site by which to explore perceptions of HIV risk as they vary according to a cultural/political/moral boundary. This population of borderlander Latino MSM did not explicitly offer AIDS as a reason for crossing the border. That is, they did not ever mention crossing the border in order to lessen the risk of contracting HIV within their sexual encounters. However, these men did discuss their perceptions of HIV prevalence and discussed their safe sex practices as they varied on either side.

The majority of the men interviewed, both Mexican-American and Mexican, located a higher incidence of HIV on the American side of the border (n=21 out of 28 total). These men also perceived high rates of possible infection in the borderlands zone on both sides: "I think that like in

the border area there is a lot of AIDS but if you travel into the interior of Mexico there is hardly any" (LMSM 6). The same respondent claimed that he would be less likely to use a condom, as either the "top" or the "bottom" if he were "far into Mexico, um, like in the Yucatán" and his perception was not unique (n=15 out of 28). However, it appears most of the men understood high risk as coincident with any geographical area hosting a large number of Americans (n=18 out of 28). These areas include tourist locations such as Matzátlan and Cancun, or business districts such as Mexico City. Altogether, it appears geographical location is indeed important in perception of HIV risk, yet geography appears to function in a distance relation to American polluters.

Safe sex prevention messages along with media messages presented on the Mexican side of the border reinforce the perception of a sterile Mexico and pathogenic U.S. *El Correo Fronterizo* claimed the following statistics of HIV seropositive individuals in 1989: U.S. had 134 infected for every million while Mexico had 45 per million. The magazine continues by saying that the unequal distribution of infections allows Mexico to begin the fight against AIDS much earlier and much more effectively than in the U.S. (*El Correo Fronterizo* May-June 1990: 5). As previously stated, most North Mexican safe sex prevention messages at the time constructed the American side as infested with HIV while Mexico remained family oriented and untouched. The top of one HIV prevention poster states "Welcome to Mexico - Your House" and asks that a man (implied through the image) think of his family whom appear on the Mexican side of a border and protect them upon his return. Media images and prevention messages disseminated along the border and within the confines of Mexico obviously reinforce a perception of HIV risk attached to America/Americans.

This perception of risk as lower on the Mexican side could have translated (and still could translate) into risky behavior. Locating risk solely in geographic proximity to Americans implies a false sense of security when distanced from American contaminants. These men, through their perceptions and practices, embodied ideologies of Mexican nationalism that associated disease with the more cosmopolitan and permissive US. Cross border cooperation in safe sex education is absolutely necessary to detach perceptions and embodiments of risk from geographic proximity while simultaneously attaching risk to specific bodily practices. I am well aware that this association of risk with certain bodily practices is in itself an attempt to embody a different regime of power-knowledge-pleasure. However, the production of HIV negative bodies through a regime of power-knowledge-pleasure based on scientific knowledge of the transmission

of the HIV virus should be desired over the other more destructive and equivocal regime based on nationalism.

### Conclusion

The manner in which these men speak about their cross-border activities helps to elucidate the bodily experience of the border itself. These men were both able to perceive the regimes of power-knowledge-pleasure on either side of the border and were able to manipulate those regimes in order to embody different experiences. Through the embodiment of these regimes the men in this small study experience the border as not just geography but as a bodily experience. However, borders are not always fraught with limitation and control. In fact, this specific border offered this group of men the ability to expand pleasures and experience an identity transvestism. This transvestism was only possible as a result of the manipulation of the specific regimes constructed on either side of a border.

As we have seen in most of the border literature presented at the beginning of this paper, borders have been understood as spaces of limitation. For many commentators, these spaces violently mark and contain identity; they demand massive deployments of capital in the form of military and policing; and they limit both the extent of nation but also the extent of possibility:

Once we have grasped how power invests borders....and creates oppressive relations, we can stress that borders – or fixed and exclusive identities – are also themselves a problem. They carve up the spaces of identity in ways that are unlivable without high personal and social costs....

(Johnson 1997: 12)

These academics leave out the possibility of an established boundary or border and shifting or transvestic identities. Oscar Martinez's (1994) notion of the borderlander as a person completely surrounded by transnational processes doesn't quite do justice to the strategic embodiments these men used to manipulate the processes themselves. In fact, these men demonstrate fixed borders or concretized lines between nations are also opportunities for creating and manipulating identities and bodies that are more fluid and adept at various performatives (Butler 1999).

As demonstrated within this paper, the border is not just a line on a map or pure geography (if such a concept truly exists), but rather is an ex-

perience of the body. The embodiment of the various regimes of power-pleasure-knowledge mentioned above contains the ability to further affect the landscape in a dialectic relation. These men saw their "selves" (as manifested through their bodily experiences of the border) as different on either side. If we are to believe Freud via Kathleen Kirby then the external environment and its very shape is a direct result of the structure of the self:

Throughout his work, but particularly in *Civilization and Its Discontents* (1930/1961) and *The Ego and the Id* (1923/1961) Freud proposed that the structure of the self is achieved through the delimitation of an external environment, and thereby suggested that the form for the environment that the self produces will recursively dictate the shape of the self. (Kirby 1996: 23)

As these men change their very embodiment/self, it is also conceivable that they change the very landscape. Certainly the experience of the border as either a concrete or diffuse concept containing or enabling behaviors is an historical and cultural production and that production can be seen in the very change of landscapes. These competing visions of the border can be seen through the practices and lived experience of the borderlanders themselves and hegemonic/nationalist preoccupations with the border. The self of nation and the self of borderlander produce hegemonic and counterhegemonic constructions of the same line in the sand.

In conclusion, the U.S.-Mexican borderlands are indeed a site of transition and cultural blurring as well as a location of extreme regulatory power. My hope is that this piece demonstrates the border as not just a site that explains behavior from an historical and political perspective but that the same border is also constituted through practices and embodiments that are intimately linked to pleasure-knowledge-power. The reality of the border and the possibilities of traversing the same border are engrained in the very fiber of the human body. The body, therefore, contains both the possibility of limitation and control as well as the possibility of permeation and resistance. Only through exploration of forms of embodiment and practices are we capable of understanding the human relationship to and with the borderlands.

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